

What the locals ate 10,000 years ago

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BYU graduate Holly Raymond worked on the excavation of North Creek Shelter as a master's student. Credit: Courtesy Joel Janetski/BYU

BYU archaeologists find a Utah site occupied by humans 11,000 years ago. The researchers documented a variety of dishes the people dined on back then. Grind stones for milling small seeds appeared 10,000 years ago.

If you had a dinner invitation in Utah's Escalante Valley almost 10,000 years ago, you would have come just in time to try a new menu item: mush cooked from the flour of milled sage brush seeds.

After five summers of meticulous excavation, Brigham Young University [archaeologists](#) are beginning to publish what they've learned

from the "North Creek Shelter." It's the oldest known site occupied by humans in the southern half of Utah and one of only three such [archaeological sites](#) state-wide that date so far back in time.

BYU [anthropologist](#) Joel Janetski led a group of students that earned a National Science Foundation grant to "get to the bottom" of a site occupied on and off for the past 11,000 years, according to multiple [radiocarbon](#) estimates.

"The student excavators worked morning till night in their bare feet," Janetski said. "They knew it was really important and took their shoes off to avoid contaminating the old dirt with the new."

In the upcoming issue of the journal *Kiva*, Janetski and his former students describe the [stone tools](#) used to grind sage, salt bush and grass seeds into flour. Because those seeds are so tiny, a single serving would have required quite a bit of seed gathering. But that doesn't mean whoever inhabited North Creek Shelter had no other choice.

Prior to the appearance of grinding stones, the menu contained duck, beaver and turkey. Sheep became more common later on. And deer was a staple at all levels of the dig.

"Ten thousand years ago, there was a change in the technology with grinding stones appearing for the first time," Janetski said. "People started to use these tools to process small seeds into flour."

Provided by Brigham Young University

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